

And for this, Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for this opportunity and want to wish His Majesty a very most welcomed visit here in our country.

NOBODY IN AMERICA WANTS TO CLOSE THE PARKS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Utah [Mr. HANSEN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HANSEN. Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in my friend from Ohio, Mr. REGULA talking about the national parks of America. The gentleman from Ohio is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Appropriations that handles those particular issues, and I am the chairman of the subcommittee that handles the authorization of the parks.

I think in America people should realize we have 368 units of the National Park Service. It costs an awful lot of money, and Mr. REGULA has that responsibility. I have the responsibility to make sure they are run correctly, managed correctly.

We find out, however, that we have a lot of parks that are in dire need of help. Yellowstone, for example, has 28 miles of impassable roads; Yosemite has problems, Everglades have problems. We have got problems in parking, sewer systems and culinary water systems.

We wonder why did we find ourselves in a position such as this. So we are doing everything in our power not only to appropriate money, but to come up with a better management procedure. We are trying to come up with ways to give the superintendent of the park a better way to do it.

The gentleman from Ohio [Mr. REGULA] talked about something is very interesting. We have a rec bill in now that will say: Superintendent of the park, if you will put somebody out at that gate, and they walk in, not only will you take that money and send it to the black hole in Congress, there is no incentive to do it.

So this rec bill we have got says this: You keep 70 percent of the money so the superintendent at Yellowstone can take care of the park without having to come to Mr. REGULA and having to spend the time. So there will be incentive for somebody to be in that park.

I find it interesting that the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Babbitt, has chosen to take H.R. 260, which passed in the 103d session, 428 to nothing, and turn it into a park closing bill. He has gone around America time after time, literally dozens of places, saying Republicans want to close parks. That is absolutely false. Nothing is further from the truth. We do not want to close parks.

What we want to do is make parks that jewel in the crown Americans want. They want to go to the park and they want service. They want the concessionaire to take care. They want the roads to be right. They do not want to see the mess that we are seeing in parks today.

I cannot understand why he is doing that. In fact, the President of the United States, Mr. Clinton, stood on the Mall and thanked them for defeating this park closing bill, which there never was a park closing bill. In fact, I wrote President Clinton and asked him a question: Where is this park closing bill? Where do you want to perpetuate this myth?

I am still awaiting an answer from the President of the United States.

We find ourselves now working on a number of pieces of legislation, a concessionaire's bill that will bring more money into the Treasury, that will have more competition among concessionaires, a healthy thing for the parks. We found the rec bill that I have talked about, as the gentleman from Ohio mentioned, of Yosemite.

The oldest park is Yellowstone. In 1915, if you had gone into Yellowstone it was \$10. Today it is \$10 for an entire car. We just cannot afford that any more.

I must ask my friends who fall in the category of having the perpetual thing as they reach 62 they can go in free. I think it is interesting if Americans would go into the Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyons, and the Zions and the Bryces and the Yosemite and see these people going into the parks, and they are over 62, and they drive in with an \$80,000 Winnebago pulling behind it a \$30,000 Suburban, and they camp for 7 days. They hook up to the electricity, the sewer and the water, and they are free for that entire time.

I have made a time to stumble through those areas and talk to these folks, and I say as I talked to these CEO's and others, a lot of them want to give us money. And they sent us money saying this is the best deal in the world.

We are not in here to rip off the public, but we do want to take care of it.

Do folks in America realize how much we are in arrears in the infrastructure of the park? It is literally billions of dollars in inholdings in other areas.

Can we take care of it? Sure we can, but we have to come up with some of these recommendations that the gentleman from Ohio brought up, and those things we are trying to do.

I say to the administration, to Secretary Babbitt and others: Stop playing political games with this stuff. This is too big to be political. Do not try to ingratiate yourselves to this administration. What we want to do is we want to take care of the parks of America.

I am a little sick and tired as every day another report comes to me. They bring in a newspaper thing or radio ad. Well, all these Republicans are trying to close our park. That is nonsense. There is nobody in America who wants to close the parks.

In fact, I brought in—as chairman of the committee I brought in the man by the name of Roger Kennedy, Director of National Parks. I had him put his arm to the square.

Mr. Kennedy, do you solemnly swear to tell the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help you God? As we have the right to do?

Mr. Kennedy said, yes.

My first question: Is there any bill that closes any parks?

One answer, one word: No.

Second question: Is there anything in H.R. 260 that privatizes any parks?

One answer: No.

The next question: Now, why is it that your Secretary, your boss, is going all over America saying we have parks to close, and he says, "that is above my pay grade."

So we find ourselves in a situation where these things are not happening. We put out the hand of fellowship to our friends on the other side of the aisle, to the administration saying let us work this out and take care of these 368 parks.

All right; the question comes up should we in any way close any parks? Again, let me refer to Mr. Kennedy, who I found to be an honorable man, and he was on C-SPAN with Brian Lamb, and the question came up should you close any? And he said maybe four or five.

Maybe there is four or five they should close. Let me give you an example of which I will not give you, Mr. Speaker, because I see my time is up.

Mr. Speaker, Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt has spent a great deal of time during his tenure traveling around the country trying to convince the public that our National Parks are doomed and that the Republicans are responsible for all the problems. The truth is that our park system is in trouble. Republicans inherited a park system just 2 years ago that was already in intensive care. While Republicans and Democrats have worked together in the last 2 years to address these problems, they have only been exacerbated through mismanagement by Bruce Babbitt and his inability to stay home and mind the store. Secretary Babbitt is directly responsible for our National Parks waste and misdirected priorities.

While Secretary Babbitt was taking fishing trips around the country, the GAO found that the National Park Service has no idea how it is spending its money, what its assets are and what its needs are. Perhaps, Secretary Babbitt should spend less time politicking and racking up frequent flyer miles and more time fixing the problems this Congress and the GAO pointed out to him over 2 years ago. Having spent 40 percent of his time traveling at taxpayer's expense, Secretary Babbitt has certainly seen the country but is doing very little to manage our national treasures.

Lets compare the records of the Resources Committee and Secretary Babbitt:

Secretary Babbitt has requested cuts in the funding allocation for park operating funds from 47 percent to 44 percent of the total NPS allocations in the past 2 years. While the Republican-controlled Resources Committee has never recommended cuts in basic park operating funds.

Secretary Babbitt has cut 525 Park Service personnel while the Resources Committee has never recommended any cuts in personnel.

Secretary Babbitt unilaterally sought or studied closure or termination of National Park

Service involvement at over 30 park units. Secretary Babbitt is studying transferring parks such as Redwoods National Park, Great Basin National Park, and Lake Clark National Park to different Indian tribes. In the mean time, the Resources Committee, on a bipartisan basis, has sought to set up a nonpartisan Commission to study our Park System and make recommendations to help save our Parks.

After Secretary Babbitt's first two choices for Director of the National Park Service—Robert Redford and Tom Brokaw—turned him down, Babbitt has filled more key park service positions with political appointees than the last three administrations combined. These are simply political favors for people who never worked a day in a park. The Resources Committee has moved legislation requiring that the National Park Service Director possess professional qualifications and be subject to Senate approval.

Secretary Babbitt is in charge of the waste, fraud, and abuse that runs rampant in the National Park Service. The Interior inspector general and the General Accounting Office found the Park Service's books unbalanced for 3 years and no method to ensure that the highest priority programs are funded. Instead of taking care of our parks, Secretary Babbitt has spent money on a \$1.6 million personality inventory, a multi-million dollar reorganization with no benefit to the parks, and a \$20,000 redecoration of the Director's hallway. While Secretary Babbitt is spending money on interior decorating—literally—the Resources Committee initiated these reports by the inspector general and the General Accounting Office to improve the operations of the Park Service, improve accountability and to help prioritize funding. Thus far, Secretary Babbitt has ignored those reports and has made few changes in his management of our Nation's parks.

Recently, Secretary Babbitt has been traveling around the country saying we need concessions reform and that we need to return more to the Federal Government. Unfortunately, the legislation Mr. Babbitt supports would exempt 80 percent of the concessionaires from competition and the Congressional Budget Office says will cost the American taxpayer \$79 million over the next 5 years. The Republican proposal would open all 660 National Park Service concessions contracts to competition and will return \$12 million back to the parks while providing \$84 million to deficit reduction over 5 years. If Secretary Babbitt wants real reform then the Republican proposal is the only alternative.

Housing for Park Service employees has been described as third world conditions in many instances. After a photo-op and the construction of three housing units, the Secretary has dropped any further efforts to resolve this problem. Republicans in the mean time have moved legislation that would encourage private sector solutions and investments for park housing. Secretary Babbitt would rather ignore the problems that don't make political hay for him. I guess taking care of his employees is just not a priority for Secretary Babbitt.

Secretary Babbitt alleges that our National Parks are broke, yet while overall visitation has been level for the past 8 years, appropriations have increased by nearly \$300 million over that same period. Where did the money go Mr. Secretary? Where did you spend it? We love our parks and so do the citizens of

this country and we expect Secretary Babbitt to manage these treasures in a responsible and protective fashion. Instead, Secretary Babbitt would rather gallivant across the Nation doing political fund raisers, going fishing, and politicizing our National Parks than stay home and manage our national treasures. Our parks need our help and the goal of this Congress is to identify the problems and find creative solutions to solving those problems. Americans don't want to just throw money at the problem, they want the problems fixed. Mr. President, we need a Secretary of Interior will actually work for our National Parks and not just travel around and fish in them.

TRIBUTE TO HECTOR PEREZ GARCIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. BROWN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of California. Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to the life of Hector Perez Garcia. Dr. Garcia, a Texas physician who led the fight for equal treatment of Hispanics and who founded one of the Nation's most influential civil rights organizations, the American GI Forum in 1948, passed away on Friday, July 26 at the age of 82 in Corpus Christi, TX.

Dr. Garcia was born in the Mexican village of Llera, Tamaulipas, on Jan. 17, 1914, to a college professor and a school teacher. His family emigrated to Mercedes, in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, in 1918 to escape the Mexican Revolution. He was one of seven children, six of whom became doctors.

He often told interviewers that he had decided to get an education soon after his family moved across the border where a high school teacher told him, "No Mexican will ever make an 'A' in my class." He graduated from the University of Texas and the University of Texas Medical School in Galveston in 1940. In 1942, he volunteered for Army duty and served in Europe as an infantry officer, a combat engineer, and a medical corps officer before being discharged as a major. He was awarded a Bronze Star with six battle stars. He met his wife, Wanda Fuscillo, in Europe during the war.

Dr. Garcia founded the American G.I. Forum in 1948 to help Mexican-American veterans of World War II gain access to services of the Veterans Administration and admission to V.A. hospitals. His organization first gained widespread attention in 1949, when it took up the cause of Army Pvt. Felix Longoria, a native of the small south Texas town of Three Rivers, whose remains were returned from Luzon, in the Philippines, for burial 4 years after World War II ended. Mr. Longoria's widow had been denied use of a hometown funeral chapel because the Longorias were Mexican-American.

After several stories about Dr. Garcia's efforts were published, Lyndon B. Johnson, then a U.S. Senator, arranged for Mr. Longoria to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

President John F. Kennedy asked Dr. Garcia to negotiate a defense treaty between the United States and the Federation of the West Indies. In September 1967, Johnson, then President, appointed Dr. Garcia a delegate to the United Nations with the rank of ambassador to focus on promoting better relations with Latin America and Spain. A year later, President Johnson made Dr. Garcia the first Mexican-American to serve on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. In 1984, President Ronald Reagan awarded Dr. Garcia the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1990, he received the Equestrian Order of Pope Gregory the Great from Pope John Paul II.

Upon hearing about his death, President Clinton released a statement calling Dr. Garcia a national hero who "fought for half a century for civil and educational rights of Mexican-Americans."

I ask my colleagues to join me in extending our condolences to the family of Hector Perez Garcia, his wife Wanda, and his three daughters, Wanda, Cecilia, and Susan. Dr. Garcia was a true American hero whose accomplishments are a testament to his humanitarian spirit.

□ 1730

REPUBLICANS INCREASE SPENDING ON MEDICARE AND VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATOURETTE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. STEARNS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, our efforts to balance the budget by the year 2002 have been a long and hard-fought process. As a party, we did not choose this fight, Mr. Speaker. The American people sent a message in the 1994 election. They made it perfectly clear that they wanted to change business here in the House, the business that has been going on for 40 years.

This weekend I held town meetings back in my district, in the State of Florida, central Florida. There were two issues that came up continually. The first, of course, was Medicare. We have a lot of seniors there, and a lot of the seniors were confused. They thought we were cutting Medicare. Of course, that is false. I will tell the Members later on why that is false.

They were also concerned about the veterans budget. Of course, we have increased the veterans benefits and the budget for the RECORD. We are not cutting Medicare, and we are not cutting veterans benefits. In both cases, they are going up over last year. President Clinton finally admitted this in an interview with Wolf Blitzer on CNN that Republicans are not cutting Medicare. He is right about that, because spending on this program will increase at twice the rate of inflation, which means that spending will rise from